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ABSTRACT

A description is provided of Cuyahoga Community College's (CCC's) approach to institutional planning. After section I underscores the importance of strategic planning in an era characterized by limited growth, accelerating change, proliferating technologies, global competition, and socio-political pressures and challenges, section II offers a definition of strategic planning which highlights its intense focus on the interaction of an organization with its external environment. Section III offers a description of planning at CCC, including a historical overview of planning problems from 1975 to 1980; a discussion of the introduction of strategic planning between 1982 and 1985; illustrations of the goals, components, and processes of the planning model; and a summary of the outcomes of the planning process. After section IV explains why and how the planning process was enhanced in 1986, section V discusses the major phases in the revised planning model: planning framework, strategic goal recommendation, and developing strategy for goal implementation. Finally, sections VI and VII offer summary and concluding remarks. (EJV)

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IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC PLANNING - A CASE STUDY OF PLANNING FOR "INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE" AT CUYAHOGA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Prepared for The Fall Issue of THRESHOLDS in Education,

titled "Strategic Planning for a Future: An Educator's Imperative"
devoted to exploring the concept of strategic planning in education,
including how to do strategic planning.

Submitted

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

Professor Igor Ansoff, well known author and consultant on planning, strategy and management, recently summarized the "new ball game" of the current era as one characterized by "limited to mixed growth, accelerating change, proliferating technologies, global competition, socio-political pressures and controls, simultaneous multiple challenges and differentiated novel challenges."[1] This description is one which, unlike the period up to the 1950s when "shared familiar opportunities" was a more accurate description, requires planning as well as managing for strategic renewal. The description, while intended for the business sector, is just as accurate for the academic sector. Today's higher education leaders (and their executive and management staff) can no longer conduct business as usual. Rather, it is imperative that we be prepared to "abandon the kind of knitting" that is of no further avail ... to engage in the development of planning and management strategies that are best suited to the level of "turbulence" to which the institutional missions now refer.

This article describes how Cuyahoga Community College District, in many ways not atypical in its "turbulence index" from other large urban institutions, has chosen to respond in its approach to institutional planning. The description outlines a brief definition and framework as well as history of its planning since 1975 and then details its transition to a focus on strategic planning as a means of bringing about institutional change. Assessement of initial efforts and key enhancements to the process in more recent times are also offered. The paper concludes by offering specific pre-requisites and ingredients for effective strategic planning as it has been learned by those who have been intimately involved in the process.

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[1] Ansoff, Igor Managing Strategic Renewal presentation at the 1985 Rike Symposium sponsored by The Planning Forum, Dayton, Ohio, October 23, 1985.

II. DEFINING STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning is distinguished from long-range planning principally by its intense focus on the interaction of an organization with its external environment. Its basic aim is to ensure that the organization adopts strategies which fully utilize its resources in capitalizing on environmental opportunities and minimizing environmental constraints. Strategic planning is typically concerned with generation of new "business" for an organization. It is that element of a manager's job and of an institutions function that deals with the contrivance of change, rather than the simple reaction to it. i.e., with important changes in direction--rather than with how to do better what is now being done. The organizational implications of this simple dichotomy are profound. Efficiency, the transforming of inputs to outputs, is the focus of the operating environment, whereas effectiveness, the degree to which future goals are achieved, is the focal point of the strategic planning function.

III. PLANNING AT CUYAHOGA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A. Historical Framework (1975-81)

A study of long-range planning at Cuyahoga Community College from 1975 through 1980 concluded it did not make a significant positive contribution to strategic decision-making or educational innovation. The approach to long-range planning was oriented toward the management and control of growth, rather than innovation and the promotion of growth. Long-range planning was document-focused and tended to generate lengthy descriptions of existing activity and future possibilities. Critical choices were not being made and little or no connection could be made between planning and the annual resource allocation process. The study concluded that a "kind of empty formalism" characterized long-range planning, "the appearance of planning transcending the substance."

This very formal planning process, however, served a valuable purpose in the context of an institution which had grown rapidly during much of its history. There was a need in 1975 to assert firmer management

control of the institution. Documentation and understanding of current programming via the formal planning process was key to effective control. Likewise, wide involvement in formal planning was an important means of building commitment to a multi-campus but single College with one mission and a set of common goals.

By 1982, the environment was changing dramatically. Growth, once taken for granted, could be achieved only through great effort. The need for educational creativity and innovation became acute -- the formal planning process could not meet the need. Steps to make it more flexible were too limited. The process remained too narrowly focused on neatness and too little guided by educational priorities.

B. Strategic Planning (FY '82-'85)

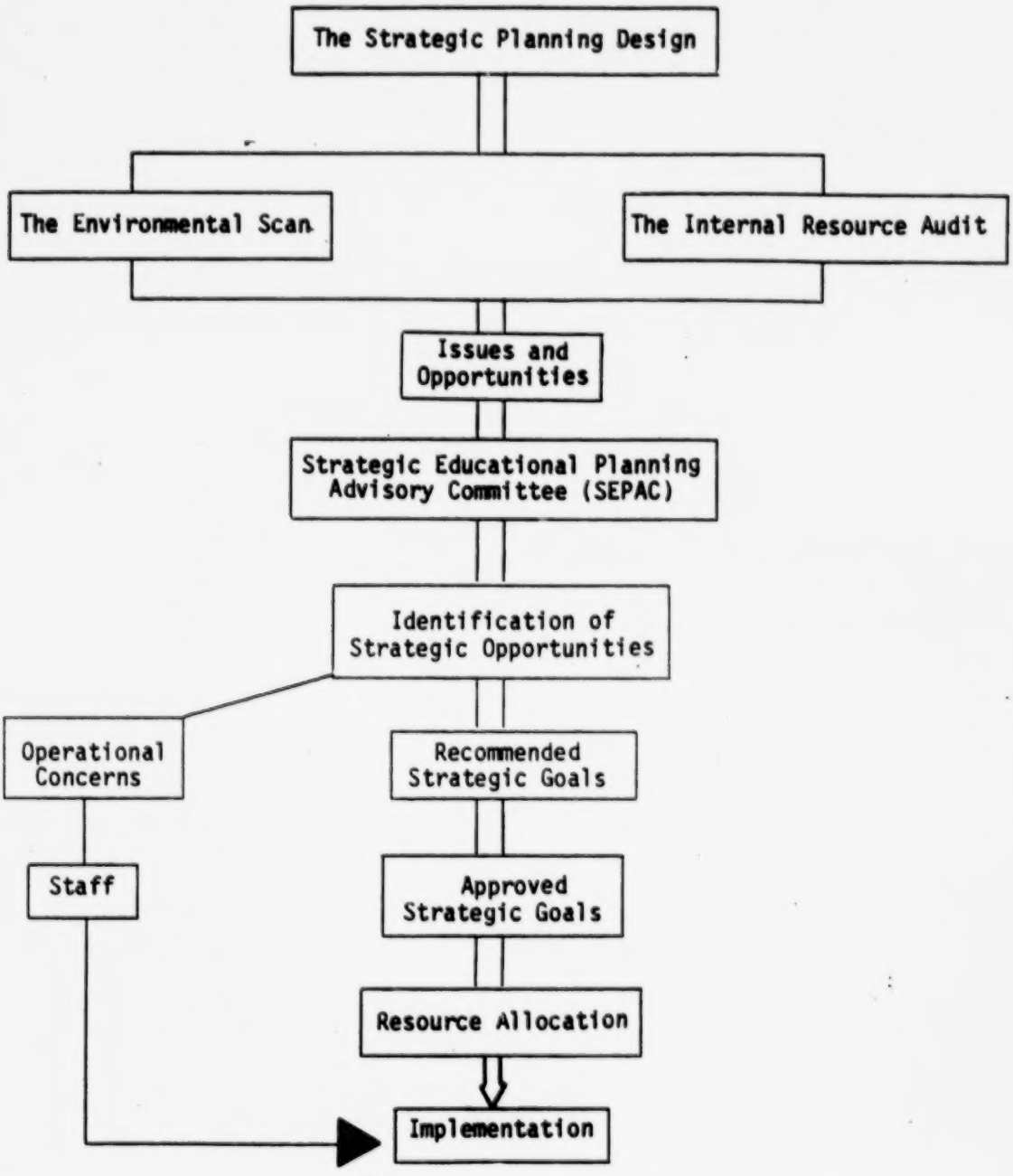
In January, 1981 the President assigned to the Vice President for Educational Planning and Development and her senior staff the responsibility to formulate and implement improvements to the College's long- and short-range educational planning processes. These improvements were to be aimed at ensuring that planning focused on innovation and that growth occurred as part of the formal planning process. The institution's educational priorities and plans were to be the "driver" of overall institutional planning. The Strategic Planning Process was designed to meet a single objective: the enablement of change.

By July, 1981, staff were trained by a consultant from the Office of the President, and had developed a plan for a strategic educational planning method to be implemented in time for FY 1983 resource allocation. This staff, it is worth noting, was comprised of the District Directors of Evaluation and Information, Student Development, Curriculum, Academic Support and of Grants Planning and Management.

During the summer months the staff developed a Strategic Planning Design Document. This design, in essence, outlined the steps that were to occur in the strategic planning process (Figure 1). They also prepared the "Environmental Scan" and the "Internal Resource Audit" along with a brief analysis of "Issues and Opportunities" derived from

Figure 1

STRATEGIC EDUCATIONAL PLANNING PROCESS (SEPP)



comparing these two documents. During the fall, the Strategic Educational Planning Advisory Committee (SEPAC) was charged to review the prepared work and identify possible growth opportunities for the College; that is, a limited number of projects that, if invested in then, would yield significant benefits to the College for the next several years and beyond.

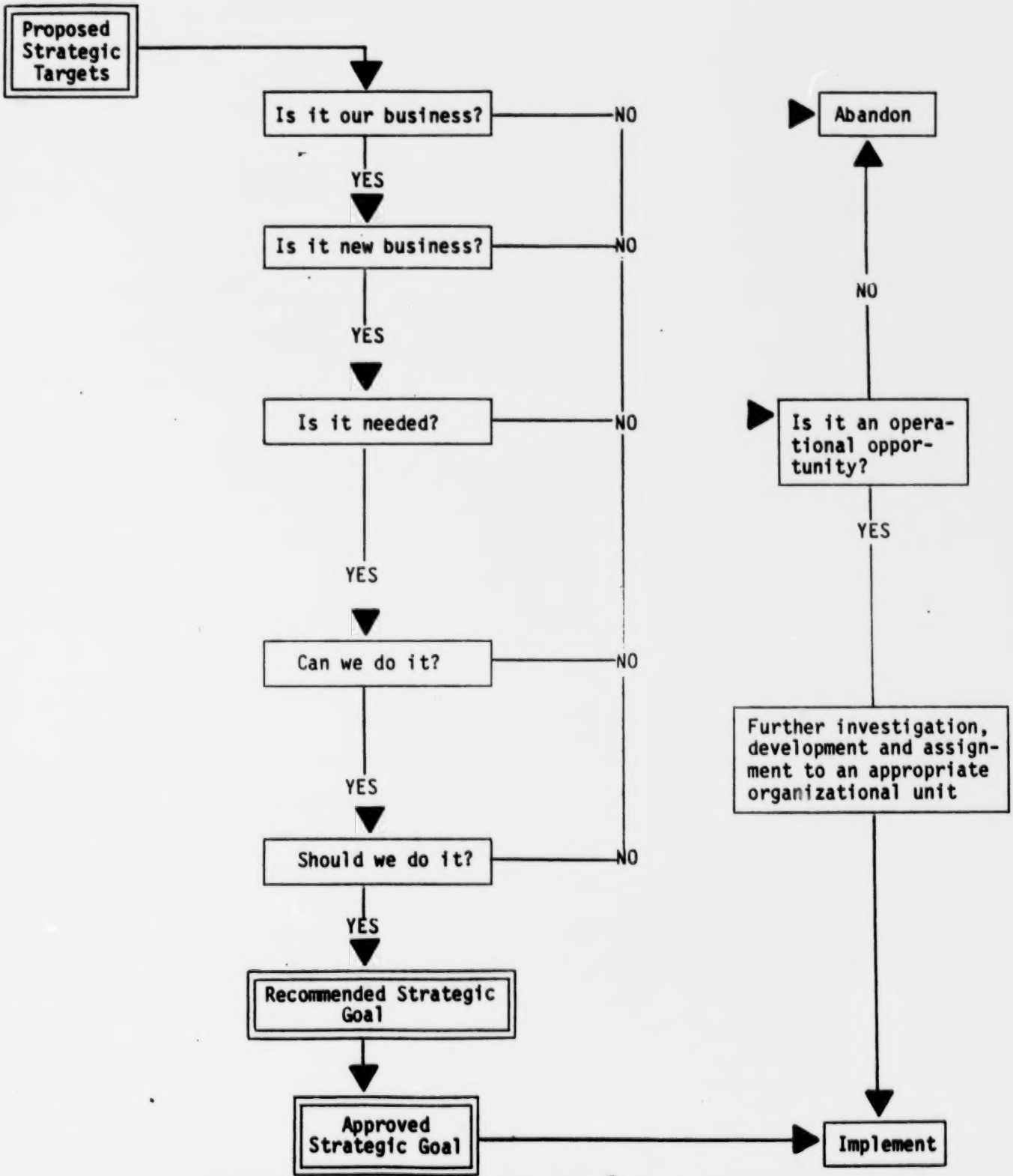
Although the process remains as an executive planning responsibility, the eleven-member committee was made up of faculty and administrators from the three campuses. They met during October and November and proposed more than twenty-five strategic targets. The selection of strategic goal(s) was guided by several criteria: (1) the opportunity should fit the scope and mission of Cuyahoga Community College; (2) the opportunity should be a new venture rather than the refinement of a current service; (3) the propsects for success should be based upon an awareness of the external demands and constraints affecting the opportunity; and (4) the proposal should match the College's capacity to implement it. The decision tree for the selection of strategic goal(s) is outlined in Figure 2.

The strategic planning process was implemented annually. From 1982-1984, a number of programmatic innovations introduced as strategic educational goals have resulted in major successes. They include the College's summer and weekend college, Career Development Institute, National Youth Demonstration program, state-of-the-art instructional delivery system and most notably, the advanced communication and advanced manufacturing programs of the Colleges $8.2 million Unified Technologies Center. The "albatross" strategic goal of the period was its FY '84 "strategies to realign institutional direction and effectiveness." Designed to meet the training challenges resulting from steadily increasing local under- and un-employment, the goal represented a "call to arms" to every functional unit of the College. It finally "died of its own weight," having been acknowledged as too cumbersome and its implementation plan inadequately if not poorly conceptualized.

All the strategic goals had been approved by the President, and had their start-up funds allocated as the top priority of the fiscal year

Figure 2

DECISION TREE FOR SELECTION OF RECOMMENDED STRATEGIC GOALS (FY 1983-85)



budget plan. This is an important consideration: the Strategic Educational Planning Process was executed with the purpose of committing funds through the resource allocation and budgeting processes. These goals had a greater chance for full implementation by virtue of the funds committed to them as much as by the intrinsic appeal of their potential.

The Strategic Educational Planning Process had been most effective over the three years. The process had:

- Ensured that strategic decisions regarding educational programming were made in an effective and timely fashion;
- Promoted systematic educational innovation and institutional growth;
- Focused on the long-range strategic leadership and decision-making role of the President and the Board of Trustees;
- Built, to the extent feasible, on the substantial planning and management system development work completed over the previous six years; and
- Resulted in improved and expanded training opportunities for the citizens of Cuyahoga County.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF AN ENHANCEMENT DESIGN

Despite its contributions, it became evident that certain enhancements to the strategic planning process would add even greater value to its impact. Ways of improving the process were indicated by the findings that the strategic planning process:

- Was not adequately coordinated with biennial and other long-range planning, annual operational planning, or the annual resource allocation process;

- Did not adequately address planning as it related to the implementation of strategic goals; and

- Had limited its focus to new institutional ventures;

- Had so far been restricted to changes only in the academic program of the College.

Proposed enhancements envisioned a strategic planning process that would:

- Serve as the primary planning activity of the annual resource allocation and budget process and provide institutional direction to the biennial budget and capital improvement planning submitted to the Ohio Board of Regents;

- Ensure cabinet level leadership and responsibility in the formulation of strategic goals;

- Improve related operational planning by development of detailed plans;

- Expand the focus of strategic planning to include all operational, management and support areas within the College;

- Provide for expanded application of strategic thinking to all individuals, levels and contexts within the College; and

- Provide for greater creativity and foresight in the use of resources available to meet the training and educational challenges of the local community.

In the strategic planning process implemented for FY '86 the Executive Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs as well as Human Resources and Administrative Affairs were together seen as the primary support arm of the Board and the President. Substantive planning assistance in strategic goal identification was provided by the President's Cabinet expanded to include the Deans of Instruction and Student Development which served as the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee. Strategic

Goal Implementation Task Forces related to the approved strategic goal were also utilized. The planning staff, comprised of the Vice President for Educational Planning and Development, the Assistant Vice President and Associate Director for Institutional Planning and Research, and Directors of Academic, Fiscal and Policy Affairs, Curriculum Management, Vocational Education, Academic Support Services and Student Development completed the staff work required for the process.

The Executive Vice President for Human Resources and Administrative Affairs issued the updated Budget Preparation Procedures Manual. The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs issued the Academic Plan of Advancement. The annual budget process remained basically the same, except for inclusion of strategic directions generated by the strategic planning process into the Executive Budget/Resource Allocation Guidelines issued by the President, and the requirement that strategic objectives be included with the budget requests of appropriate units. The Executive Vice Presidents ensured that executive budget requests focused on institutional plans and priorities and that targets for enhancements and innovation were included within appropriate areas of operations.

A summary of the design elements of the FY '86 Strategic Planning Process is shown in Figure 3.

V. KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS (STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS - FY 1986)

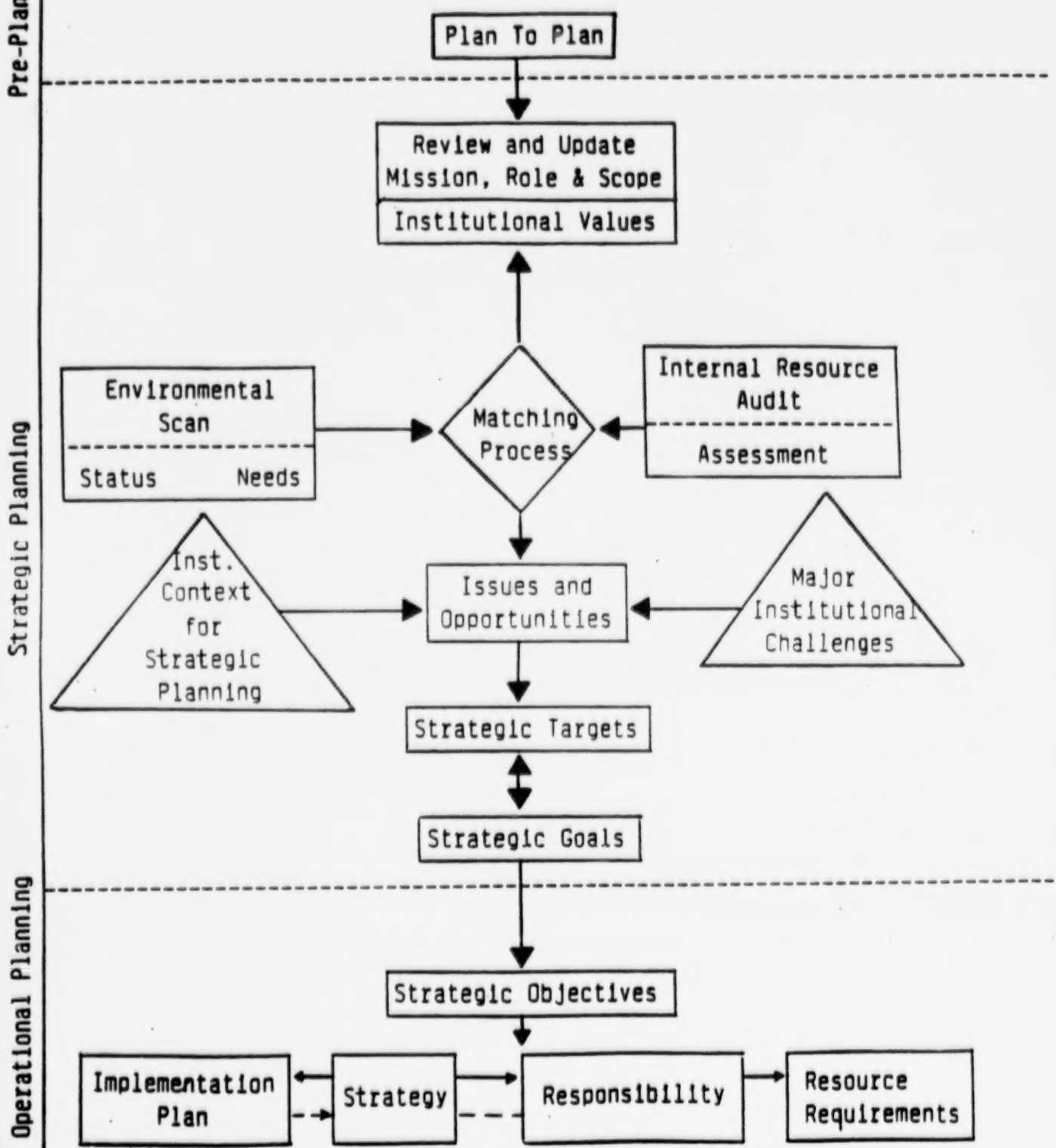
The primary purpose of the FY'86 Strategic Planning process was to establish and link strategic initiatives with resource allocation/reallocation/supplemental allocation and annual and biennium budgeting and operations. The Enhanced Strategic Planning process occurred as the planning activity to the annual resource allocation process. It consisted of the following major steps:

A. PHASE 1 - PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The responsibility primarily of Academic Affairs staff and occuring between June and September, the outcome of this phase was a Strategic Planning Framework and context for FY '86. Phase 1 required review

FY '86 STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



and enhancement of the Strategic Planning Process and confirmation of the calendar; preparation and collegewide distribution of a Strategic Planning framework for the year(s) ahead - The President's statement; an Environmental Scan Update which focused on analysis and implications of external conditions most relevant to an institutional market service plan; an Internal Resource Audit which described faculty capability, skills and training needs, programmatic changes and needs, program related quality, cost, capacity and opportunity elements, and management systems capacities, limitations, and related conditions; identification of Issues and Opportunities which appeared to represent major challenges to the College in the year(s) ahead;and a Charge to the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee.

B. PHASE 2 - STRATEGIC GOAL RECOMMENDATION

The responsibility of Cabinet membership (expanded to include all Deans) as the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee and occuring during October and November, the outcome of Phase 2 was the Strategic Goal for FY '86 to FY '90. Phase 2 required establishment of, and information about Planning Standards and Criteria (Executive Budget Guidelines, Productivity Standards, and other planning tools); determination and confirmation of preliminary Base Budget figures; identification of specific strategic targets of opportunity related to institutional management and/or programmatic issues; formulation of a strategic goal with corresponding objectives which represent fundamental change orientations in the form of significant enhancements or new business; development of estimated budget requirements; confirmation of strategic goal and estimated budget recommendations; and confirmation of Strategic Goal Implementation Task Force (SGITF) Membership and Charge. A modified set of criteria were used to select a strategic initiative. They were that a strategic initiative (1) be an institutionwide initiative; (2) require a total institutional commitment; (3) have the potential for lasting impact on the whole College or its environment; and (4) have clear indication of a demonstrable outcome.

C. PHASE 3 - DEVELOPING STRATEGY FOR GOAL IMPLEMENTATION

The responsibility of Task Forces selected by their operational leadership responsibility for implementation of objectives within the strategic goal, phase 3 occured from December to January and had as its outcome detailed strategic goal implementation plans. Phase 3 required refinement of objectives; identification of and criteria for assessing outcomes; detailed description of a plan to accomplish each objective (including structure, process, responsibility, time frame and plan for integrating activities with ongoing unit operations); detailed assessment of resources required to accomplish objectives; reallocation or supplemental source of funding, and special strategic goal budget requirements, and integration of objectives and budget requirements into appropriate unit level planning and budgeting framework.

The enhanced strategic planning process has indeed been the driving force to resource allocation, reallocation and supplemental allocation and has resulted in a strategic goal which now represents the "driving theme" for all operational planning. It is a goal designed to "make and market Cuyahoga Community College as the College of First Choice for adults and high school graduates throughout the county."

VI. SUMMARY

Cuyahoga Community College's Institutional Development Program was launched in 1975. As its management system development effort evolved, the environment served by the College changed significantly. It grew increasingly more turbulent and uncertain. Rapid institutional growth had come to an end, and, after a short period of enrollment decline, modest growth followed by unpredictable enrollments were evident. Over the last four years, a new era has begun -- one that continues to demand aggressive, creative and innovative long-range educational and institutional planning if growth is to be maintained and strengthened in the foreseeable future. Institutional growth, in essence, is a goal to be attained through extraordinary thought and effort...it has required a most effective strategic planning process.

The College has made impressive progress in the development and implemenation of modern management systems and practices, including short- and long-range institutional planning processes. These systems are clearly set forth in its Planning, Management, and Evaluation Manual, the annual budget process documented in its Resource Allocation Design Document and Budget Preparation Procedures Manual, and in strategic planning as described in its Strategic Planning Design Document update in 1985.

There is no question that Cuyahoga Community College has become a classically well-run organization, particularly in its financial management and control and in its strategic planning for educational programs and services. But Cuyahoga Community College's long range, strategic and operational planning occur at different levels within and outside the College. Its strategic planning must reflect as well as influence state level planning. Plan implementation occurs only at the operational level. Thus, while strategic planning and budgeting are different processes, their integration is imperative to ensure that strategic planning outcomes can effectively influence annual program planning and implementation. Achieving the coordination and development of line managers required for strategic planning to permeate all levels of the organization requires a carefully constructed and closely scrutinized strategic planning model.

VII. CONCLUSION

Today's higher education planning has changed. The function no longer requires traditional, linear-thinking operations managers. Thus, there will continue to be winners and losers. The winners are concerned about institutional survival. Winning institutions are:

- adept both at developing plans and ensuring their execution.
- visionary and able to ingest gargantuan amounts of unrelated student and competitive data; and catalyze the key elements of information into solid, doable plans that will put the institution out in front of its competitors.

- missionary and able to effectively nurture the institutional plan and infuse it into the daily tasks and decisions of thousands of employees.

These fast-trackers thoughtfully and continually combine executive and management skills and experience in planning and strategic management, finely honed over the years, with new and timely expertise. Such institutions are ready to redefine their plans, and allocate their resources in light of the opportunities and challenges anticipated by new and emerging trends.

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